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## EMPLOYABILITY FOR GRADUATES IN SAUDI ARABIA: A REVIEW PAPER

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### ABSTRACT

*In Saudi Arabia, unemployment problem has been a big problem. Higher education in Saudi Arabia has previously been chastised for failing to meet labor market requirements. Higher education graduates, according to research, have focused on disciplines that are not in high demand in the work market. Furthermore, students of institutions of higher learning have been shown to lack the broad competences required in today's competitive market. The purpose of this chapter is to show how Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions are closing the gap between higher education and the labor market. Despite the fact that the private higher education sector in the United States is still relatively new, the data shows that higher education institutions have already been attempting to address graduate employability issues through their courses, extra curricular, and career-related services. Topics taught, instructional approaches used, and the usage of English in the classroom are all examples, as are planned project experience and career counsellor services.*

**KEYWORDS:** Education, Employability, Graduate, Saudi Arabia, University.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia, as a significant regional businessman in the Middle East, has been focusing on the development of its resources in order to gradually wean itself off its reliance on petroleum. Indeed, in this era of globalization, the government requires a qualified workforce to compete. Over the last two decades, there has been significant investment in education at all levels, resulting in a higher number of university graduates. Saudi Arabia has a high unemployment rate, notwithstanding the country's significant economic and educational expansion. Graduates' employability is a serious issue that both graduates and policymakers are grappling with. Saudis account for 11.7 percent of the entire workforce, with 6.8 percent of males and 29.6 percent of women unemployed. Saudi Arabia's authorities are grappling with a big problem: a relatively high jobless rate among graduates. Previously, unemployment and employability aren't really a major worry for the administration or the business sector since the government hired all university graduates.

Graduates of higher education were most often employed in the public sector. Furthermore, public-sector jobs were dependable and just needed a minimum degree of education. The promise of a job in the government for all college graduates created a false feeling of security, causing them to be less worried about their newly acquired skills. The government supplied almost all of the services. On the other hand, the public sector is now overburdened with graduates and could no longer guarantee employment to every one of them. Instead, government programs have

entrusted the private sector with the task of creating jobs. Private-sector employers, on the other hand, report that college grads fall short of expectations. As a consequence, Saudi unemployment varies from that of most other nations, where weak economic conditions and widespread poverty are the main causes of unemployment. Saudi Arabia's research and skills system is claimed to have failed to meet the country's economic needs. It has been said that Saudi students need to develop the skills and competencies necessary in the job market. To deal with the unemployment problem, the government has implemented a "Saudization" strategy.

According to Alzalaban, "Saudization" "refers to the necessity to replace non-Saudi employees in the workforce with Saudi locals," and "as a consequence, it tries to urge Saudi natives to play a more active part in the country's social and economic growth." Saudization aims to minimize the amount of non-Saudi employees while pushing businesses to hire more Saudi citizen[1].

As per the literature on the subject, one of the key reasons for the rise of private higher education is the public sector's failure to meet labor market needs. This chapter examines the extent to which Saudi Arabia's private higher education meets labor market demands. A brief overview of Saudi Arabia's private higher education industry will be offered, as well as an evaluation of graduate employability studies[2].

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Fred Thompson's study revealed a link between three key state policy issues: (1) comparative (private–public) tuition pricing, (2) state student-aid funding, and (3) public institution density and private college and university competitiveness. Government regulation has been found to have little effect on elite private schools. The density of public institutions and low public pricing have a negative impact on large and somewhat selective private institutions. These expenses may dissuade students from choosing these private institutions over equivalent public schools. The findings suggest that, in this era of high higher education costs and limited public sector capacity, government actions should use price mechanism (student aid and public institution pricing) to encourage students to consider whether private higher education can meet their needs as well as or better than public institutions[3].

Attempts to foster the formation of generic traits, according to B. Little's research, seem to have met with little success. Recent research has shed some light on this seeming policy and practice heterogeneity. It is clear that university professors in Australia who are responsible for creating students' generic graduate qualities lack a consistent knowledge of the nature of these outcomes, as well as the teaching and learning procedures that can help them grow. Academics, on the other hand, have fundamentally different perspectives on the phenomenon of graduate features. The qualitatively different perceptions of graduate qualities found in this study have been applied to the task of modifying a university's policy document outlining the share some common of its graduates. The article summarizes the study's main results before detailing how the findings were integrated into the university's policy statement, resulting in a research-driven approach to academic development. The resulting two-tiered policy is discussed, as well as the important academic growth processes linked with the framework's disciplinary contextualization. The discussion focuses on the alteration in the connection between discipline knowledge and generic attributes, which would have been a major component of the qualitative alteration in understandings discovered in the study, as well as several of the ramifications of this innovative approach to policy structuring at a university[4].

Bennett discusses the need for a better understanding of core and generic skill acquisition and development in higher education and employment in his study, which comes amid growing pressure from employers, government agencies, and those who are in charge of higher education administration and financial support for their effective delivery. This pressure seems to have had little effect so far, in part because educators are wary of the message, the messenger, and the

language employed, and in part because the abilities required are lacking in clarity, consistency, and theoretical grounding. Any empirical effort to improve practice understanding necessitates the development of generic competence and course offering models. These models are accompanied by evidence of their usefulness, such as instances of the previously described course provision patterns[5].

### **3. DISCUSSION**

#### *3.1 Private higher education in Saudi Arabia:*

Saudi Arabia has a relatively new private higher education industry in relation to other regions of the globe. It has existed in the United States and Latin America for for a century, and for nearly two decades in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe and other Middle Eastern nations, but only since 1999 in Saudi Arabia. The first effort to provide private higher education, which consisted of just one institution, was made in 1967, but it did not take on, and it was turned into a publicly financed and regulated university in 1971. Private higher education has taken on a variety of forms and services across the globe. In Saudi Arabia, private higher education institutions are those that are governed by private investors or non-profit organizations rather than the government. There is a major difference in financing sources between public and private higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. Although public higher education is free, privatized higher education relies primarily on tuition fees and receives only a little amount of government funding.

Private higher education schools exclusively offer university degrees, not vocational education. Because foreign ownership is prohibited in Saudi Arabia, there seem to be no transatlantic private organizations, yet foreign ownership is permitted in many other nations. According to Saudi Arabian legislation, there must be at least five partners functioning as joint owners. A corporation may also be a shareholder. Private institutions may have both a non-profit and a profit-making character. The bulk of private institutions, on the other hand, are profit-driven. With the exception of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), a new research university, most Saudi Arabian private universities concentrate on teaching rather than research. In comparison to other East Asian or Eastern European countries, where private higher education enrollment rates average 70% and 30%, respectively, private higher education accounts for only 6.4 percent of overall enrolment in elevated education in the United States. The rise of private higher education in Saudi Arabia is a reaction to the public sector's inability to fulfill demand for more, diversified, and better higher education, according to a research done by Jamjoom. Saudi Arabia has a unique collection of challenges, including historical, cultural, social, demographic, and economic difficulties.

Each of these concerns has a direct influence on the need for a more robust higher education system. Saudi Arabia need private higher education as a necessary complement to a public system beset by problems, rather than as a lucrative add-on to a successful public industry. Over a 20-year era highlighted by tremendous population increase, the government's higher education system has scarcely grown. This resulted in a capacity shortage, which harmed the education sector's quality. The public sector's graduate education quality has been a serious problem, resulting in high unemployment rates among university graduates. Despite broad awareness of public-sector issues, the private sector did not begin to prosper until 1998, when the government gave it permission. The parts that follow demonstrate how Saudi Arabian institutions of higher learning help graduates find work[6].

#### *3.2 Higher education and the labour market:*

The link between higher education and the labor market is complex. According to research, private higher education institutions are actively contributing to their labor market connections. According to Levy, one of the key reasons for the current global rise of private higher education is to suit

commercial needs (which the public sector has failed to achieve). The interaction of private institutions with the labor market is seen to be crucial to their legitimacy. Private higher education schools, particularly those that are new to the business, have been seen engaging with the job market in an unusual manner. Even private institutions, which are generally regarded to be of lower quality than public institutions, have been proven to be guilty. Because of their labor force focus, Levy classifies these private organizations as "major demand-absorbing." Many studies examine the link between higher education institutions and the job market, separating the behaviors that make these institutions relevant or related to the labor market from those that do not. Curriculum, career services, training, and social activities are just a few examples of practices in higher education that have been shown to be labor market relevant and so increase graduate employability.

Before continuing on, it's important to note that in this chapter, graduate employability refers to graduates' "work-readiness" for the workforce. Employment and employability, according to Yorke, are not the same thing since the first is all about getting a work and the latter is all about keeping a job. One of the academics that looked into approaches for colleges to improve graduate employability was Yorke and Knight. Brennan, Kogan, and Teichler's method, for example, has five components: (1) disciplinary knowledge; (2) disciplinary skills; (3) professional awareness; (4) workforce competence; and (5) generic skills. Courses offered as part of both the institution's curriculum give information on a variety of disciplines. Some research examines how important a subject of study is in terms of landing a job after graduation. Higher education provides courses and equips students with skills required in the workplace, according to discussions on curriculum relevance to the labor market. Employers may find it easiest to assess a graduate's knowledge of the topic they are seeking employment in by looking at their areas of studies or graduate specialities. Academic knowledge and discipline-related talents, on the other hand, are shown to be inadequate for graduate employment. The literature on graduate employability emphasizes "generic talents," often known as "transferable skills" or "essential abilities."

Bennett defines "generic skills" as "skills that can support study in any discipline and can be transferred to a variety of contexts in higher education or the workplace." Basic competence, communication, flexibility (i.e. task solving), uniqueness, personal growth, effectiveness, and impact are among these talents. While there are several lists of the kind of general talents that companies need, The Pedagogy for Employment Group compiled a list of competencies that employers expect graduates to possess based on 25 years of study. Higher education institutions should help students transition from school to the job market, in addition to providing them with crucial general skills. Higher education, according to Brennan, may help graduates transition by assisting them through the job search process, establishing career prospects for students by networking with businesses, and dealing with intermediate organizations. The following sections demonstrate the degree to which Saudi Arabian private higher education institutions engage in higher education labor market activities[7].

### *3.3 The use of English language for teaching:*

While Arabic is the official language of Saudi Arabia, most private foreign firms prefer to communicate in English. The use of English is growing more popular as the Saudi government communicates with other nations, notably prior to joining the Foreign Organization that promotes foreign investment. It's worth emphasizing that in the past, English skills was not a requirement for work since the public sector was the preferred option for university graduates. On the other hand, the situation has drastically altered. As mentioned previously in the chapter, the public sector is overloaded, and for most graduates, the private sector is becoming the only option. Previously, private companies relied on foreigners to run the business and communicate with other employees in English.



As a consequence, English is increasingly becoming the language franca for international employees. The Saudization strategy, on the other hand, has lately pushed businesses to recruit more Saudis and reduce their dependence on foreigners. Employers in the private sector are growing more worried about graduate employability skills as a consequence. This is especially true for multinational or worldwide companies, which stand to lose a lot of money if their branches don't communicate well. While English proficiency is not required in settings where this is not the primary language, students who are proficient in the language have better work prospects. Graduates with a great command of the English language aren't limited to working in their own country. The use of English as a medium of teaching at Saudi Arabian private higher education institutions, rather than Arabic in the public sector, has become a major selling factor.

Indeed, English is not only a requirement but also a distinctive feature of Saudi Arabia's private higher education institutions. It's worth noting that Saudi Arabia's private higher education institutions really aren't affiliated with foreign universities. In other words, competency in English is a choice for a local university rather than a prerequisite for admittance to a foreign institution. Employability is one of the most significant advantages of utilizing English as a teaching language in Saudi private higher education institutions. Furthermore, it improves access to new instructional resources for students in private higher education (which higher education institutions receive when they make English the language of teaching). This may have a positive impact on children's self-esteem. Due to the obvious English language, students have easier access to information, which may give them more trust in the information they get. This isn't to say that graduates' mastery of the English language isn't enough to boost their self-esteem; in fact, having this capacity makes graduates feel more superior than those who don't[8].

#### *3.4 Career centre:*

As mentioned in the preceding section, students have a difficult time obtaining a job that will allow them to complete their co-op training. According to Jamjoom, students at private institutions have less of an issue since employment centers are more readily available. The major goal of a career center at a private university is to facilitate internships and employment through coordinating between firms and senior and graduate students. It is a job-related service that is almost entirely offered by private businesses. Even after students graduate, the career center continues to help them. The career center continues to connect organizations searching for qualified individuals with learners who have to be trained or recruited.

Students in the private sector may be able to find this type of training via their school's career center. Private higher education schools' career centers assist students with curriculum vitae writing, interview practice, and attendance at job fairs. Companies contact employment centers when they are looking for students to hire; however, that's not the situation with higher education institutions. It's likely that a private institution's small size makes it easier for businesses to find career centers. According to studies, private organizations are increasingly using private corporations in their activities. The career fair is a very well meeting point for universities and businesses. The employment fair brings together a variety of organizations to introduce graduates and job seekers to numerous career prospects. Networking opportunities for students and graduates are often available at such events. One employer said in response to Jamjoom's research: "We engage with higher education institutions via career centers, which are more active at private colleges than public universities."

Government agencies still use faxes instead of email, proving that we don't communicate in the same language. It's worth emphasizing that, despite the fact that private universities are more expensive, best efforts to improve graduate job readiness, employment for their graduates is not always guaranteed. Even if all university graduates are completely equipped with the requisite information and abilities, the job market is still not ready to accept them. This is especially true for

female graduates, since not all business organizations are gender-friendly[9].

### 3.5 Extracurricular activities:

Private higher education schools are seen as different not just in terms of academics, as well as in terms of extracurricular activities, which have ramifications for student development and graduate employment. Extracurricular activities, according to the Webster dictionary, are "activities conducted by students outside of the usual syllabus of school or university education." The usefulness of extra - curricular activities in higher education has been investigated in many research. Many academics feel that what happens outside of the classroom in college may help students achieve their goals. Extracurricular activities, according to Clegg, are any academic activity that students engage in outside of the classroom. Paid labor, art, theater, music, faith/cultural activities, family, domestic, or caring activities, political participation, sports and/or other sorts of physical exercise, and volunteering are just some of the possibilities.

Extracurricular activities in Saudi private higher education schools include international field excursions, athletic activities, clubs, workshops, seminars, and lectures that are not connected to specific courses but are supported by separate colleges and/or sponsored by student unions. Public higher education institutions, on the other hand, are less likely to engage in such recreational activities. Bureaucracy is a serious obstacle for public higher education institutions. It must be acknowledged that the government has more control over higher education in the school sector than in the private sector.

As per the president of a public higher education institution, private institutions "provide things that we [at the public university] can't easily do" or "bring a guest speaker that we can't conveniently host." We take some of our children to [private higher education] institutions, which may appear uncommon given our inability to fit such activities into our busy schedule. Because our kids have courses from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., they do not have time to engage in extracurricular activities[10].

## 4. CONCLUSION

This chapter's main purpose was to emphasize the significance of Saudi Arabia's newly created private higher education industry in resolving the country's graduate employment problem. The gap among higher education and the job market seems to be being bridged by private higher education. Their academic and extracurricular activities have shown this. Saudi private higher education schools that stress graduate employability skills, and also the use of English for education and the marketing capability of the majors provided, are found to have unique internship, teaching, and assessment techniques. As a result, the link among Saudi private higher education as well as the labor market corresponds to the conclusions of authors such as Levy and Cao. Private Saudi Arabian institutions are clearly working hard to make sure that their alumni are employable. Such initiatives, on the other hand, are bound to fail unless such labor market accepts them.

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